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Days from retirement, Milwaukee Police Chief Ed Flynn and his boss accuse each other of misconduct

Ashley Luthern and Mary Spicuzza, Milwaukee Published 11:10 a.m. CT Feb. 13, 2018 | Updated 11:24 a.m. CT Feb. 15, 2018



(Photo: Michael Sears, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

Outgoing Milwaukee Police Chief Edward Flynn has accused the executive director of the city's Fire and Police Commission of trying to interfere with an internal investigation, prompting a sharp rebuke from the civilian oversight board, which now is accusing Flynn of abusing his police powers.

Flynn — who is set to retire Friday — made the allegations against MaryNell Regan to WISN-TV (Channel 12) in a report that aired Monday evening.

"I truthfully answered a direct question regarding a recent internal investigation that resulted in discipline," Flynn told the Journal Sentinel late Tuesday. "I stated that (Regan) attempted to intercede on behalf of the subject of that inquiry."

What began as an investigation into whether a police captain abused his authority has grown into a series of increasingly personal attacks between Flynn and his bosses — with both sides leveling serious accusations of misconduct.

The clash comes as the commission prepares to name Flynn's interim replacement on Thursday.

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Regan said she was "extremely disappointed" in what she called Flynn's "final attack" against her, the commission, the mayoral administration and Common Council members.

"I was deeply disturbed to learn this week that he used the city's \$330 million agency to personally conduct surveillance on me, and others, for over a year, purely for retaliation," she said.

Flynn flatly denied her accusation, saying he did not direct or authorize anyone to do such surveillance.

"I have no desire to continue to play a part in what is becoming a 'conflict' story when it is abundantly clear that the relevant City Hall decision-makers have already circled the wagons around one of their own," Flynn said.

The internal affairs investigation at the center of the dispute began last year, after Milwaukee Police Capt. Johnny Sgrignuoli went to City Hall and asked to view surveillance video for personal reasons, three sources told the Journal Sentinel.

10/22/2018

Milwaukee Police Chief Ed Flynn his boss allege misconduct

A security officer at City Hall told a representative of the mayor's office about Sgrignuoli's request to view the video footage.

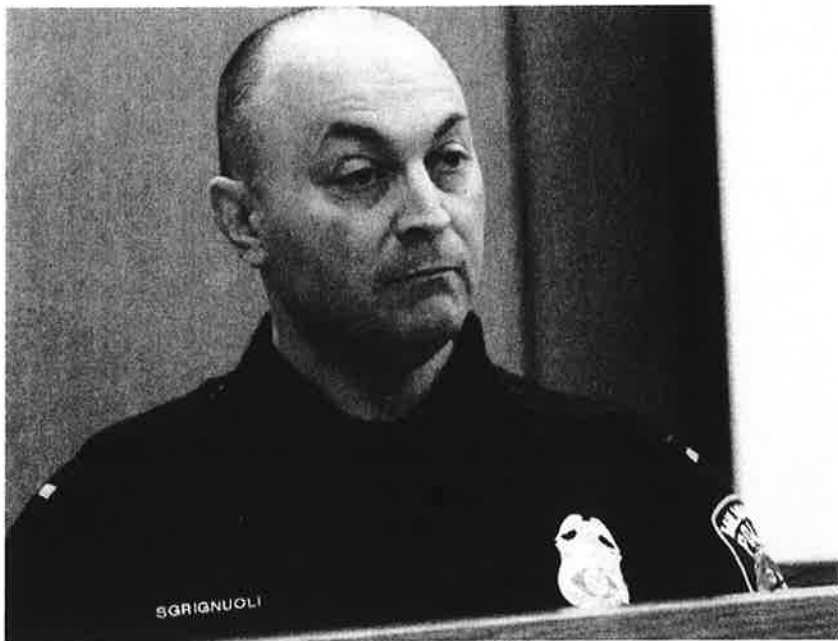
"I want your readers to know that we started this investigation," Mayor Tom Barrett said in an interview with the Journal Sentinel. "Not only did we start it, it never stopped."

Flynn suspended Sgrignuoli for five days.

A captain, deputy inspector or inspector cannot appeal a suspension of five days or less to the commission, per the Milwaukee Police Supervisors' Organization contract.

Sgrignuoli's suspension was handed down in August. Shortly after that, the Journal Sentinel requested his internal affairs file. As of Tuesday, the request remained pending.

As a result, Sgrignuoli's reasons for seeking the video were unclear. Reached Tuesday, he said he had not been authorized by the chief's office to give a statement.



Milwaukee Police Capt. Johnny Sgrignuoli. (Photo: John Klein, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

Sgrignuoli and Regan have been friends for years, the sources said.

RELATED: Remember that viral video of Milwaukee Police Chief Edward Flynn? Here's the story behind it. (<http://story/news/crime/2018/02/08/remember-viral-video-milwaukee-police-chief-edward-flynn-heres-story-behind/313514002/>)

At some point during the investigation into Sgrignuoli's actions, the Police Department took steps that led Regan to believe she, too, was under investigation, the sources said.

"The major concern regarding her in this matter was that she might be being stalked," Flynn told the Journal Sentinel. "Therefore the nature of her relationship with the subject was relevant, insofar as determining that it was consensual, to allay fears for her safety."

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Flynn has said Regan told him to drop the investigation or he would likely be sued.

"My conscience is clear," Flynn said Tuesday. "All relevant documents support the disciplinary findings. I am not the only one who heard what she said to me and I am not the only one who knows I brought my concerns to senior officials."

Regan denied the chief's accusations.

"I never threatened a lawsuit," she told the Journal Sentinel. "I pointed out deficiencies in the investigation that could lead to a lawsuit."

As executive director of the city's Fire and Police Commission, Regan runs the day-to-day operations of the board and is a key adviser. Regan, a former assistant city attorney, was appointed to the post by Barrett and confirmed by the Common Council in 2015.

Although she holds a powerful position, she does not vote on issues before the civilian oversight board, including matters of discipline.

Commission Chairman Steven DeVougas said late Monday he was aware of the TV news report but had not seen the internal affairs file. He said he would order an investigation "into this misuse of city resources" and said he was "distressed and disappointed" at Flynn's actions.

"I question the legality of him conducting surveillance on her personal life and I can only assume this was done to harass her or to gain leverage over her," he said.

Regan, DeVougas and Barrett said they want to know how the internal affairs reports were made public since they were either released without blacking out sensitive information or leaked.

"If the un-redacted Internal Affairs document was leaked who are the responsible parties and why was the document so readily available for release at this point in time?" Barrett asked in a statement.

"These are questions the Fire and Police Commission has an obligation to investigate," he said.

Flynn said he categorically denies "playing any role in the release of investigatory materials to a television reporter."

"I was disappointed but not surprised when the first reaction of (DeVougas), and apparently the mayor, was to want an investigation into a 'leak' rather than the potential serious ethical conflict of interest I addressed in the interview," Flynn said.

DeVougas questioned the timing of the news report and accused Flynn of "proactively sharing a negative story" in an attempt to distract the city from the "business of moving on."

"We will not be distracted and we will move forward with new and positive police leadership," he said.

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